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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
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## PROBABLE SUCCESSION TO PRESIDENT GOTTWALD

The death of President Klement Gottwald within three days of his return from Stalin's funeral will leave a vacuum in the Czech Government and Communist Party which he had led since the Communist coup in February 1948. His leadership of the Party has been unchallenged since September 1951 when Rudolf Slansky was removed from the powerful post of Secretary General of the Party and his powers were transferred to Gottwald as Party Chairman. No other Czech Communist leader enjoys Gottwald's prestige among the Party rank and file or with the Czech people. However, the stability of the Communist regime is not in doubt and it is very probable that Gottwald's successor will have little trouble maintaining his control of the Party.

Premier Antonin Zapotocky is the most logical successor to Gottwald as leader of the Czech Government and Communist Party. Zapotocky, who became Premier in June 1948, is a veteran Communist and was for many years the head of the Industrial Trade Union Movement. In the past he has enjoyed considerable popularity among the workers and wields the greatest amount of influence in the Party. He is noted as an outspoken critic of internal shortcomings in Czechoslovakia.

Zapotocky's power as Premier was significantly enhanced at the end of January by the concentration of control of the government in an inner cabinet of nine deputy premiers under his chairmanship. Among the deputy premiers are the strongest contenders for power among the younger generation of Communists. They include Alexej Cepicka, Minister of National Defense since 1950 and son-in-law of Gottwald, who has acted as trouble shooter for the Czech Government since 1948 in resolving such important problems as the reformation of the court system, the fight against the Catholic Church and the Sovietization of the armed forces; Viliam Siroky, former Minister of Foreign Affairs and Chairman of the Slovak Communist Party; Jaromir Dolansky, former Minister of State Planning and reportedly in control of all economic ministries at present; and Karol Bacilek, Minister of National Security.

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At least two possibilities present themselves in the matter of succession to Gottwald's position. Zapotocky may himself occupy the Presidency and be replaced as Premier by one of the younger Communist leaders, probably Cepicka, as a means of grooming the younger man to take over leadership in the future. This possibility is strengthened by reports of the 68-year old Premier's poor health and by the prestige of the Presidency in Czechoslovakia.

The second possibility is that the Presidency will be relegated to a figurehead and that, as Premier, Zapotocky will actually assume complete control of government policy. In this case, Zdenek Nejedly, doyen of the Czech Communist Party who was given unusual accolades on his seventy-fifth birthday in February, appears to be the most likely candidate for the position of President. This possibility becomes more plausible when one considers that the establishment in January of an inner cabinet significantly strengthened the position of the Premier. It is very possible that the reorganization took place in expectation of the early demise of Gottwald. Czechoslovakia is the only Satellite with the exception of East Germany which still maintains both President and Premier and the Presidency can be expected to be abolished in the future.

In any case, Zapotocky will very probably succeed Gottwald as Chairman of the Communist Party and thus wield all real power in the country. His policies can be expected to follow fairly closely those of Gottwald. He belonged to the Gottwald wing of the Party in opposition to the Slansky faction, and Zapotocky is no more likely to attempt to break away from Kremlin control than was Gottwald.

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